



STICKS

AND

STONES

REBUILDING OUR FUTURE

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U.S. Representative Gene Taylor has become an icon for the people of the Gulf Coast in a gargantuan battle with insurance companies that has all the drama of the legendary confrontation between David and Goliath.

On one side you have the citizens of the Gulf Coast who lost their homes and businesses in the most catastrophic hurricane to hit the United States in the last 100 years. These are folks who grew up with the catchy slogans "like a good neighbor" and "you're in good hands." They thought their insurance company would be there to help if disaster came knocking.

"We had to walk past a gauntlet of people, clamoring for news about their homes," Taylo



On the other side you have the insurance companies-corporate giants who with straight faces say the life-changing event called Katrina was a flood. A flood with anywhere from 50 to 175 mile per hour winds which washed away your home, my home, Gene Taylor's home - thousands of homes - and left the Gulf Coast with a serious case of the slabs.

These good neighbors insist that all damages which occurred from this catastrophic event should be assigned to the federally-backed National Flood Insurance program and not them. A stance Gene Taylor does not agree with. He believes the insurance companies should be held accountable to both the policyholders and the taxpayers.

During the week Taylor is in Washington D.C. demanding justice for the people of the Gulf Coast - which is exactly what we expect our U.S. Representative to do.

But on weekends he's in Bay St. Louis, in a trailer with his wife Margaret, rebuilding their home and their life - one stick of wood at a time - just like the rest of us.



He recently took time out from working on his house to reflect on the last 20 months.

Sometimes it seems like it happened just yesterday. Other times it seems like a million years ago.

"We've all been through a hard time," he said. "The folks who really want to live here are still here."

It's called pioneer spirit.

"We rode out the storm in the Kiln at my brother's farm," he recalled. As soon as the storm was over Taylor and his 17-year-old son, Gary, set out for the Bay to assess the situation.

Highway 603 from the Kiln to the Bay was under water, so they had to leave their car behind and take a boat. What they saw was surreal. "A pool table floated across the highway in front of us, the balls perfectly cued in the rack," he said. There were boats in trees.

Apprehensively they headed south toward Cedar Point which juts into the Bay of St. Louis.

What they saw when they got there was incomprehensible. Only one house remained on their entire street.



MARGARET TAYLOR lends a hand.





It was growing dark by the time they turned the boat around and headed back to the Kiln. Upon arrival, they were immediately surrounded. "We had to walk past a gauntlet of people, clamoring for news about their homes," Taylor said. All we could say was, ' It's gone. Everything is gone.'"

When he finally hooked up with administrative personnel, there was another shock.

Huddled outside a hastily pitched funeral tent he found the larger than life mayors of Bay St. Louis and Waveland, Eddie Favre and Tommy Longo, and County Administrator Tim Keller.

"Eddie, Tommy, and Tim were filthy and exhausted," he recalled. Glen Dore, better known as "Boss Hog," was cooking beanie weenies for everyone. "I asked Eddie where the food had come from and he said, ' we raided the Winn Dixie, the Save-A-Center and Wal-Mart.' That's when I knew it was bad. Help had not arrived."

From those dark days the citizens of the Coast have risen off their knees and taken matters into their own hands.

Margaret Taylor added her own thoughts to the conversation. "I think people know the most basic form of government occurs when everyone is in the same boat and everyone is hurting. Everyone has needs."

Nowadays, the Taylors are empty nesters. Their two daughters are married and their son is

away at college.

And what started out as an 800 square foot guesthouse for their children on the back of the lot, may end up being their permanent home. The home, which towers 24 feet off the ground, has been expanded to 1,100 square feet. "Small is good," Margaret smiled.

As long as it's home.

And what does Gene Taylor want the Easter Bunny to bring him this year? "State Farm's head on a platter," he laughed.

It's all about justice and family and putting things right. One step at a time.





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